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Araujo interviewed at talks

The following is an interview of Abilio Araujo made by the BBC World Service during the East Timorese 'reconciliation talks' at an undisclosed location somewhere near Cambridge:

Q: You have long been known as one of the leading Fretilin figures for East Timorese independence. Why have you decided now to join these talks which are being held by Indonesia and which most people involved in Fretilin are boycotting?

A: First of all I would like to say that I took the initiative, I made the invitation to Mr Lopes da Cruz some months ago and I am very happy that their response was very positive. So this initiative is an initiative taken by myself and fully supported by Mr Lopes da Cruz. I would like to greet the Indonesian authorities that also helped that this meeting could take place. It is a sign of goodwill that we appreciate very much.

As for the talks I would like to say that everything that is related with reconciliation is always a good thing. That's why everyone should support it. I am sure that sooner or later - and for my part I will do my best - to open, to enlarge the participation of the Timorese outside in this process. And I am sure that one day the people who will come to see our brothers who come from East Timor will be more than today.

Q: The problem is that very few people imagine that Indonesia can offer anything even approaching autonomy for East Timor and if you get anything less than that, it doesn't seem like a major breakthrough. There will still be a big division between Indonesia and the East Timorese and the Portuguese who want independence.

A: I dont say that the Portuguese want independence. I dont say what the others want. I would like to say what we, the East Timorese want. We want life, we want a better life, we want development, we want a good and bright future for our people and for our children. And that's why I believe that the Timorese leaders who are in East Timor, who are playing an important role both in administrative and in political things, have a very important role. And since they are working together with our people, we want to hear from them what is the level of the life in East Timor. And our main concern at this moment is the life, the physical and spiritual life of our people.

Q: Have you abandoned the goal of independence yourself?

A: I myself I used to say that our right of self-determination has been denied for 400 years.

Q: And what about the accusation that some of your colleagues would make that the reason that you have now decided to join these Indonesian-sponsored talks is because you were expelled from the

Fretilin Central Committee earlier this year?

A: First of all I must say that I was not expelled. I am president and this is still so. But for this meeting I came in my personal capacity. Because I want that these talks are talks of Timorese, non-party talks, and we come here as old friends, as brothers, to meet each other. And I would like to say again that these talks are an initiative taken by me some months ago and I still dont understand why people continue to say that it is something that is bad. Why?

Q: Are you worried at all about being manipulated by the Indonesian government?

A: I want to say clearly that, first of all, we are in a process of dialogue at all levels. If there is dialogue, why are Timorese forbidden to talk to each other? The destiny of our people, first of all, stays in our hands.

Q: But with Indonesia keeping a very close watch on what you're doing because, after all, this meeting here has involved the help of the Indonesian embassy and a lot of Indonesian staff.

A: I only, I only can thank the support as I did already since the beginning. Without the support, without the understanding of the Indonesian government, we would not come here. And it is a positive aspect. It shows that there is goodwill from the Indonesian government and I want to stress this.

Q: Thanks very much indeed.